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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH THE WOMEN'S BAR  
ASSOCIATION BOARD

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE E. DERSE PER 1.4(B,D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a November 20 lunch with the board of the Women's Bar Association, the Ambassador noted that women have much to contribute to Azerbaijan, particularly in democracy and human rights promotion. The board members briefed the Ambassador on their work, highlighting the fact that although the association was just registered in August, it already has more than 200 members. The association appears to be off to a strong start, and its focus on gender-related issues may inspire a broader public debate on this often overlooked area. END SUMMARY

12. (U) On November 20, the Ambassador hosted a lunch for the Women's Bar Association (WBA) board. Guests included President Sabina Gahramanova; Vice President Mehriban Abdullayeva; Vice President Khamim Ahmedzade; Secretary Lala Hasanova; Treasurer Khalise Shaverdiyeva; Coordinator Nigar Huseynova; and board members Narmin Kerimbeyova and Rovshana Rahimova. The WBA is supported by USAID and the American Bar Association Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative. The Ambassador opened by noting that women have much to contribute to Azerbaijan, particularly in the areas of democracy and human rights.

13. (C) WBA President Sabina Gahramanova explained that the WBA's main role is as intermediary between the GOAJ and NGOs focused on women's issues. She noted that the State Committee for Women's, Children's, and Family Issues refers many cases to the WBA because of a lack of capacity to handle a high volume of complaints. Gahramanova said that the WBA is trying to develop contacts with more women in education, and more young women. In addition, she said the WBA should expand to work on religious issues, particularly at Azerbaijan's universities, where young women can become "confused" about religion.

14. (C) WBA Treasurer Khalise Shaverdiyeva briefed the Ambassador on the WBA's background, noting that the group was created in December 2006 and officially registered in August 12007. Although newly registered, she said the WBA has already attracted more than 200 members. Shaverdiyeva said that the WBA aims to strengthen women's empowerment by increasing both the protection of women's rights and raising greater public awareness of these rights. She also shared the WBA's goal to increase voter turn-out among Azerbaijani women in the October 2008 presidential election.

15. (C) Shaverdiyeva said that she hoped the WBA would be able to assist in the implementation of the GOAJ's anti-corruption strategy. The WBA had submitted a proposal to the GOAJ, she explained, but had not yet received a response. The Ambassador noted that the Embassy has presented the GOAJ with recommendations on this strategy, including the suggestion that NGOs like the WBA be included in the GOAJ's anti-corruption commission and in an independent advisory

committee to the commission. The group discussed the strong role women played in Azerbaijan's history. Gahramanova noted that Azerbaijan had the first female diplomat in the eastern world. The Ambassador commented that women's historical democracy promotion efforts makes Azerbaijan unique and demonstrates a real potential to move forward.

¶16. (C) Gahramanova noted that many of the female Members of Parliament have taken an active interest in the WBA, particularly Gular Ahmadova and Vice Speaker Bahar Muradova. Shaverdiyeva said that female officials from many of Azerbaijan's ministries also are supportive of the WBA. Turning to the association's future plans, Gahramanova said the WBA board was reviewing and compiling more than 30 proposals for its work plan. She pointed out that the next few years will be very busy for the WBA, with a presidential election in 2008, municipal elections in 2009, and parliamentary elections in 2010.

¶17. (C) The Ambassador raised potential GOAJ Internet regulation, which the group said they would like to be involved in. Gahramanova said that very little information on international best practices for Internet regulation was available in Azerbaijan, particularly regarding the issue of freedom of expression and security. Shaverdiyeva noted concern that the public would not be incorporated into the discussion on this draft legislation, as is the norm in Azerbaijan. She concluded that there is a widening gap between Azerbaijan's laws "on paper" and their implementation.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: Although new, the WBA appears to be off to a strong start, and has begun to be recognized by the larger legal community, and the public, as a place to go for expertise on gender-related issues. Its focus on this often overlooked area is refreshing, and may help generate a

broader public debate on hot-button issues such as domestic violence and trafficking in persons. We will continue to engage with the WBA and explore areas of potential future cooperation.

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